

INTERVIEW
granted by
Erich Honecker,
First Secretary of the
SED Central Committee,
to "Unsere Zeit",
German Communist Party
(DKP) newspaper



PANORAMA DDR

Erich Honecker, First Secretary of the SED Central Committee, granted an interview on current problems of the GDR's domestic and foreign policy to Georg Polikeit, chief editor of the German Communist Party (DKP) newspaper, *Unsere Zeit*, to mark the forthcoming 25th anniversary of the German Democratic Republic. A translation of the interview is given below.

C *gaffet's*

UZ: Comrade Honecker, three years have passed since the Eighth Congress of the SED, whose decisions have met with lively interest in our country, and both among friend and foe. Has your party achieved what it had planned for this period?

Erich Honecker: I can answer your question with a straightforward 'yes' without any feeling of complacency, which is alien to us communists. We have been able to chalk up great successes in both domestic policy and foreign relations. We are implementing the decisions of our Eighth Congress step by step.

Thanks to the UZ many working people in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) are informed about the continuous implementation of the primary task defined by our Eighth Congress, which is to raise people's living and cultural standards ever higher. As you know we are putting into effect the biggest-ever social policy programme in the history of the German Democratic Republic. We are pressing ahead with our housing construction programme under which the housing problem in our country is to be solved by 1990. Already during the current Five-Year Plan period ending in 1975 we are making available to the population, especially to working-class families, well over 500,000 new or modernized flats. The rents charged for these flats—those for modern flats have in the meantime been reduced—are inconceivable in capitalist countries. In the last three years alone housing conditions have been improved for something like one million citizens of the GDR. Wage and pension increases have been introduced and the minimum pay has been raised with prices remaining stable. Increased economic efficiency made it possible to increase the net monetary income

of the population by 4,900 million marks in 1973. The additional amount spent on old-age and disability pensions in the same year was 1,200 million. Health services in our country are being further expanded; the welfare of families, especially of young married couples, has been improved. A few weeks ago we were able to extend the minimum holiday for working men and women in our country and to effect certain price cuts and wage increases.

I could list many more impressive examples to show that everything is being done in our workers' and farmers' state to enable citizens to live better today than yesterday, and to live better still tomorrow. It can be said without exaggeration that social welfare measures as sweeping as those introduced since 1971 have never before been achieved in a three-year period in the history of our workers' and farmers' state.

Needless to say, this progress does not take place automatically. What we have achieved is chiefly due to the application and initiative of the working class and of the whole working population, to the close, trustful relationship existing between the people and the party and, to an especially high degree, to the universal cooperation existing with the Soviet Union.

Precisely for this reason the nation's economy is growing on planned and continuous lines. Last year industrial output rose by 6.8 per cent and national income by 5.5 per cent. But economic growth figures do not say anything about the way profits are distributed. Under capitalist conditions a worker will usually get only a very modest share of these.

In the GDR, however, as in all socialist countries, capitalist exploitation has been ended once and for all, and we need no philosophy of the "limits to growth". What our factories produce is for the benefit of all. No one can get rich by squeezing private profit out of the working population. Here we have the real source of the rising level of material and cultural prosperity in the GDR. Under socialism hard work repays both the community and the individual. Let me add that as we see it the standard of living denotes the entirety of people's living conditions. As well as pay and stable prices we include job security, a sound and free educa-

tion—it is common knowledge that we are completing the introduction of general ten-year' polytechnical schooling—, cultural experiences, sport, organized holiday activities and, last but not least, the rights of the working population. To use a word in vogue in your country, socialism has long since created a new quality of life.

UZ: In the face of the current crises in the capitalist world which deeply affect the lives of working people, one question is asked time and again in the Federal Republic; how is it that there are neither inflation nor oil or other crises in the GDR or in other socialist countries? What is the secret?

Erich Honecker: I understand this question very well. After all, I belong myself to a generation which was still confronted directly with capitalism, its defects and outrages. I know, therefore, what it means for a working-class family when they find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, when rents are suddenly increased or father loses his job. You are quite right; crises and inflation are unknown to us. But there is no secret about this. For what are the causes behind inflation, job insecurity and similar evils? As is shown day by day in the capitalist part of the world they are clearly and exclusively due to the capitalist relations of ownership and power which make maximum profit the supreme consideration. In our country the working class led by the SED radically did away with these primitive conditions in a huge process of revolutionary change after the Soviet army's victory over Nazism, thus acting in accordance with the basic trend of development in our time.

In this way the root causes of the boom-recession cycle, of rackrenting and land speculation have been removed once and for all. Workers' and farmers' power and public ownership of the means of production are stable foundations enabling the working class and its allies to develop not only the economy but the whole of society on planned lines and to add to continually the people's prosperity.

In this context the fact that the GDR is firmly integrated into the

crisis-free community of the socialist states rallied around the Soviet Union is of crucial importance. Under the long-term programme of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid which outlines the tasks for the next twenty years the fraternal socialist countries have begun, on the strength of previous experience in cooperation, to interlink their national economies and to organize production on the basis of advancing cooperation. You know that the crises hitting western countries are symptoms of a lack of stability. We, for our part, can refer to stability and security which are, distinctive features of socialism.

UZ: Important progress has been achieved recently along the road to détente and the preservation of peace, as you yourself have often pointed out. What is this progress based on and how can that which has been achieved be expanded and made irreversible?

Erich Honecker: There has indeed been remarkable progress towards the safeguarding of peace. The important treaties which the countries of the socialist community have concluded with capitalist states including the FRG are evidence of this. Substantial proof is also provided by the altogether positive development which the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe has taken. There have also been many other signs indicating a noticeable improvement of the international climate. We warmly welcome these results to which we are known to have made a constructive contribution in conjunction with the other signatory states of the Warsaw Treaty.

If you ask me for the reasons behind the progress achieved along the road to détente and the safeguarding of peace I must say that life itself has provided the answer. Mankind owes this progress largely to the Soviet Union and the entire socialist community. It was chiefly their political, economic and military strength, their international prestige and their policy of peace that have changed the international balance of forces and pushed the proponents of the "cold war" into a defensive position. We also appreciate the contribution made to the relaxation of tensions by political leaders

and governments of capitalist states, including the Federal Republic of Germany, who have adopted more realistic positions under the influence of a new situation. And there can be no doubt that the campaign of the labour movement and of the peace forces in the capitalist countries for peace and security has carried great weight and that this will remain so in the future. Everyone in our country knows how indefatigably the German Communist Party and, with it, broad democratic sections in the Federal Republic are working for the easing of tensions. They are thus rendering a great service to the national interests of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Admittedly, we are only at the beginning of a reorganization of international relations on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence between states with differing social systems. The imperialist arms profiteers, the advocates of the "cold war" have not yet given up. Now the point is to make what has been achieved irreversible and to expand it. It is quite clear that we for our part are ready to do whatever we can in this direction.

Where workers and farmers wield power a policy of peace is the official doctrine of the state. But in future, too, much will depend on the vigilance and activity of millions of peace-loving people in the capitalist part of the world. If they press for the strict observance and complete fulfilment in both letter and spirit of the treaties concluded, if they press their will for détente and do not allow themselves to be misguided by anticommunist propaganda the chances are all the greater for imperialist wars to be banished for ever from the lives of the peoples.

UZ: How do you judge the development of relations between the GDR and the FRG since the coming into force of the General Relations Treaty? How can and should things develop in the interests of peace and of the people?

Erich Honecker: Taken all in all, we have made more headway in the normalization of relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany than certain people

In your country want to admit. The conclusion of the General Relations Treaty provided a solid formal basis for reasonable and normal relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. It has been followed in the meantime by a series of treaties and other arrangements whose usefulness has long been demonstrated. There have been widespread contacts between the citizens of the GDR and the FRG. This has helped gradually to overcome certain reservations.

It goes without saying that the General Relations Treaty does not change the social antagonism between the socialist GDR and the capitalist FRG in any way. Hence it can only be useful to make a realistic appraisal of both the possibilities and the limits of the development of relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic. What is possible and necessary is the expansion of normal relations on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence in order to arrive at businesslike cooperation in the interest of peace and of the people. We are convinced that the existing possibilities have not yet been exploited by far. We are persisting in our constructive policy, which is directed at peace and détente, and will most definitely work energetically for the further normalization of relations between the GDR and the FRG and with other capitalist states. The attitude of the FRG government under Chancellor Schmidt justifies hopes of progress although the fact should not be overlooked that the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court on the complaint lodged by the state of Bavaria against the General Relations Treaty has proved a large obstacle to the expansion of our relations. More efforts should be made in your country to recognise the political changes that have taken place in the relations between our states, notably during the last three years. Both sides should not allow political sensationalism to interrupt this development.

UZ: The 25th anniversary of the GDR's foundation is imminent. This event has for weeks been prepared for in your country as a national holiday. What do you believe are the basic lessons confirmed by 25 years of successful development in the GDR?

Erich Honecker: The 25 years that have passed since the founding of the German Democratic Republic mean very much to someone who has fought in the ranks of the revolutionary labour movement from his earliest years. After all, this period has produced what Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Ernst Thälmann fought for, what many of our best men and women laid down their lives for: a German state of workers and farmers, which shows every day anew what historic achievements a people can bring forth if it is liberated from capitalist exploitation and organizes a socialist society. Many things could be said about our development and our experience. But in my view the crux of the matter is this; the GDR could emerge and undergo a successful development because the working class overcame the split in its ranks, because it created a strong revolutionary party, because it entered into a firm alliance with the peasantry and the other working people and chose the right side in the great class battles of our time, the side of the Soviet Union and its battle-tested Leninist party, the side of the fraternal socialist countries. This was and remains the guarantee for the further strengthening of the GDR, for a bright future.

Comrade Polikeit, please convey my cordial greetings to the readers of your newspaper. The members of the German Communist Party and all working people in your country can be certain that the SED will hold high the banner of proletarian solidarity for ever.

(From *Neues Deutschland*, Berlin, 30 May 1974)

PANORAMA DDR-Auslandspresseagentur GmbH
GDR - 1054 Berlin Wilhelm-Pieck-Straße 46
Translated by Intertext Berlin
Printed in the German Democratic Republic
by Grafischer Großbetrieb Völkerfreundschaft Dresden
4220-#2

